

Processing Rape Cases: Media versus Reality

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University Honors Capstone Project

Purpose of Research

- Media has a way of distorting reality.
- People are uneducated on the topics portrayed in the media.
- Tend to believe what the media portrays is reality when that is not the case.

The purpose of this paper is to compare/contrast how rape cases are handled in the media versus reality.

Literature Review

Much of past research focused on:

- Inaccurate portrayals of the types of crimes shown on entertainment television shows
- Stereotypical characteristics of a Victim
- Stereotypical characteristics of a Suspect/Offender

Method

- Law and Order: SVU Season 16 (Episodes 1-11)
- PAVSA – Makoons Miller-Tanner
- DPD – Investigator Ryan Temple

Reality

Duluth PD

- 2 different ways to receive cases
- Investigator reviews case
- Determines what evidence needs to be collected
- Evidence collected includes a sexual assault kit
- Investigators gather DNA Swabs from the suspect (with a search warrant)
- Get in contact with the victim regarding their case
- Determine which interviews need to be conducted
- Help from PAVSA for interviewing victims
- Probable cause to make an arrest or need an arrest warrant from St. Louis County Attorney's Office
- If an arrest is made, police are essentially done, unless they have to testify in court in rare cases

PAVSA

- Victim presents at hospital after having been sexually assaulted
- Advocate is dispatched to the hospital
- Once a SANE exam is done, advocates will ask if victims would like a follow-up phone call
- If DPD requests PAVSA's assistance, an advocate will receive the police reports and files on the case, reach out to the victim, and assist in a SANE exam
- If contact is made with the victim, an exam is done per request of the victim, the hospital gives the exam kit to the police department

Media

Law and Order: SVU

- Interview victim
- Question the suspect
- Process of gathering evidence and creating a chain of events
- Once legitimate arrests have been made, they proceed to court
- During court, victims, suspects, outsiders involved, and detectives testify
- After the initial court proceedings, they go back to court with either more evidence to support their case, or the suspect is sentenced

Note: This is not an across the board protocol for what goes on in an episode dealing with rape cases.

Due to the back and forth interviewing and questioning frequently throughout each episodes, it is hard to draw a concrete pattern for how rape cases are handled.

Discussion: Discrepancies in Reality and Media

- Arresting process
- Court
- DNA and Evidence testing
- Re-victimization (constantly interviewing the victim)

Further Research

Further research could look into what factors the County Attorney's Office consider when deciding to prosecute or not.

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